

On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss

David Kessler and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross; Scribner, 2005; ISBN 0743266285

"You don't ever bring the grief over a loved one to a close." So state authors David Kessler and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in the beautifully written book *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five States of Loss*. The book is a follow-up to the original Kubler-Ross book *Death and Dying* as well as the collaborative efforts of Kubler-Ross and Kessler entitled *Life Lessons*.

This book looks at Kubler-Ross' five stages of death and dying through the lens of the grief process. The book is particularly poignant because Kubler-Ross died soon after the completion of this book in August 2004. To the extent that Kubler-Ross, who had battled a debilitating illness for more than nine years, is able to discuss her own personal acceptance of dying, the reader is offered a rare insight into the five stages from its creator. Chapter 6 of the book, entitled "Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: My Own Grief," and written on July 17, 2004, is Kubler-Ross' account of being partially paralyzed following a stroke. In an extremely moving account, Kubler-Ross examined personal loss that she had experienced, loved ones she had lost and how she survived. She ends her chapter with the profound words:

I now know that the purpose of my life is more than these stages. I have been married, had kids, then grandkids, written books, and traveled. I have loved and lost and I am so much more than five stages. And so are you. It is not just about the life lost but also

the life lived. (page 216)

Kessler, in the book's preface written after Kubler-Ross' death, also discusses his grief process in coming to terms with Kubler-Ross' dying and death. Titled "I am Done," Kessler recounts when he and Kubler-Ross finished work on this project. "Am I done then?" Kubler-Ross asked. Kessler remembers Kubler-Ross stating, *Listen to the dying. They will tell you everything you need to know about when they are dying. And it is easy to miss.* (page xv)

In addition to their accounts about grief and grieving, Kessler and Kubler-Ross ably tackle grief, grieving and the myriad ways people deal with loss. The book is divided into seven chapters:

1. "The Five Stages of Grief"
2. "The Inner World of Grief"
3. "The Outer World of Grief"
4. "Specific Circumstances"
5. "The Changing Face of Grief"
6. "Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: My Own Grief"
7. "David Kessler: My Own Grief"

There are a plethora of gems in this book, but in addition to the chapters already cited, of particular note are chapters 3 and 4—in the wake of both the Tsunami disaster and the 9/11 tragedy (both referenced in the book). How individuals cope after major, sudden tragedies has become of great interest to the public.

This book delivers with true insight into coping after a sudden loss. Chapter 3—"The Outer World of Grief," deals with topics such as anniversary, holidays and finances. The chapter is peppered with insight such as:

Mourning is the external part of loss. It is the actions we take, the rituals and the customs. Grief is the internal part of loss, how we

feel (page 115) and

The dying ultimately must accept that their lives are now complete just as they are. (page 158)

Chapter 4 deals with "specific circumstances" such as how children grieve, dealing with grief during a disaster and coping with the suicide of a loved one. For anyone trying to make sense of the senseless, such as the death of a loved one during a crime or disaster, this is the chapter to read.

Kubler-Ross contributed immensely to the public's understanding of how we die, how we prepare ourselves for death but, ultimately, how we live. This posthumous publication is a tribute to an individual that has left an indelible legacy on the grief and grieving landscape.

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Understanding Health Literacy: Implications for Medicine and Public Health

Edited by Joanne G. Schwartzberg, MD; Jonathan B. VanGeest, PhD; and Claire C. Wang, MD; AMA Press, 2005

This useful volume is written for physicians and other health-care professionals. It is organized into four sections, and the chapter authors do their best to integrate their subject matter into the theme of each section. Their major achievement, however, seems to be that each chapter is in fact a self-contained research paper, with all the references listed at the end of the chapter, instead of at the end of the book.

As I thumbed through the content, I noticed that the authors were concerned about first creat-